

CPYRGHT

JANUARY 21, 1962.

Washington

22 JAN 62

Scientist and Government

A Critical Problem

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By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, Jan. 19—Ever since Plato started tinkering with the arts of government, men have been worrying about the conflict between an official's duties and his personal economic advantage.

From Plato, who forbade his philosopher kings to hold any outside economic interests, to "Engine" Charlie Wilson, who had to sell his General Motors stocks, a whole series of lawyers, petty functionaries, big business men, family relatives and cronies have been in trouble. And now, of all people, it is the American scientist who is in danger.

In the last generation he has been hurled by the scientific revolution out of his laboratory into the uppermost regions of industry and government and, what is more serious, into both at the same time.

The conflict-of-interest laws do not protect him. They were written for a world that has passed and do not deal with the problems of the new world that has come. They were directed at the old-time appointees of the spoils system and in particular at government claims and contracts.

A Delicate Partnership

The scientific work of the nation is now done on a partnership basis because there simply are not enough qualified scientists to give the Government, industry and the universities separate and complete staffs.

And the funds available for this work are astronomical. The total Federal research and development expenditures in the new budget amount to \$12,365,300,000. This is an increase of \$2,121,000,000 over last year and is \$9,264,300,000 more than in the fiscal year 1953.

When the Association of the Bar of the City of New York looked into this problem in 1960, it noted with satisfaction the rise of the American scientist to a position of official, industrial and popular esteem, but added the following:

"The scientist and his work product are in demand; he has discovered that he can make money; and he has found as an administrator that he can man the control tower of institutions that give him a voice and community power."

Accordingly it is not surprising that a Government consultant can easily find himself today asked for opinions on questions that could benefit companies or universities he serves. Yet he is not protected by the laws as they now stand.

The Two Masters

It is no answer to quote the Sermon on the Mount that "no man can serve two masters," though the con-

flikt-of-interest laws rest on this Biblical injunction. Nor is it enough to do what the first Congress of the United States did when it forbade the Secretary of the Treasury to invest in Government securities. Despite the long history, this is a new problem of the scientific revolution, which the scientists themselves, the Congress and the Administration have to resolve fairly soon.

The political dangers for the Administration are clear enough. Already there have been stories in the press about specific cases of scientists benefiting personally from their Government associations, and if Sherman Adams can get in trouble with Bernard Goldfine over a borrowed rug and a hideous vicuña coat, it is not hard to imagine the political dynamite in a \$12,000,000,000 research and development program staffed at least in part by scientists who work part in the Government and part outside.

Some bills have already been introduced into the Congress to deal sensibly with this problem. Most of them would allow a scientist to avoid the penalties of the conflict-of-interest laws if the head of a Government agency certified in advance that his help was needed in the national interest. This would at least take the problem out of the present murky phase where it could easily trap an innocent man in a national scandal, tarnish the new shining symbol of the American scientist and produce a splashy investigation that would alienate the whole scientific community.

Yet the problem of the scientist is merely one dramatic illustration of the central problem in Washington today. This is the failure of men and institutions to keep up with events. No matter how men try to meet the revolutionary changes of the time—and most of them are doing their best—they find old attitudes of mind, old laws, old ways of picking and promoting legislators, and old methods of selecting and rewarding executives blocking their progress.

The scientist is different only in the sense that under the present circumstances he is more vulnerable to unfair political attack.

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